

Shorty and the Stay

By SEWELL FORD

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Say, I don't know whether I'll ever get to be a regular week-end or not, but I've been making another stab at it. What's the use of owning property in the country house belt if you don't use it now and then? So last Saturday, after I shut up the studio, I scoots out to my place in Primrose Park.

Well, I puts in the afternoon with Dennis Whaley, who's head gardener and farm superintendent, and everything else a three-acre plot will stand for. When about supper time, as I'm just settling myself on the front porch with my heels on the stoop rail, wonderin' how folks can ever live all the time where nothin' ever happens, I hears a chug-chug, and up the drive rolls a cute little one-seater bubble, with nobody aboard but a Boston terrier and a boy.

"Where?" thinks I. "They'll be givin' them gasolene carts to babies next. Wonder what fetches that kid in here?" Maybe he was a big ten or a small twelve; anyway, he wasn't more. He's one of these fine haired, light complexioned youngsters, and I'm sure he would have had yellow faunty curls and been rigged out in a lace collar and a black velvet suit, and had a nurse to lead him around by the hand. But the new crop of young Astergoulds, Thackwades is bein' trained on different lines. This kid was a good sample. His tow colored hair is just long enough to fouse nice, and he's bare headed, and he's got on corduroy knickerbockers, a khaki jacket, black leather leggings, and gauntlet gloves and he looks almost as healthy as if he was poor.

"Hello, you're like to bump me," said I, losing the shuffler overboard. "Beg pardon," says he; "but I drive my own machine."

"Oh?" says I. "I might have known by the asturner." By this time he's standin' up with his hand to his ear, squintin' back out through the trees to the main road like he was listenin' for somethin'. In a second he hears an engine, and then he sees a red car, and he says, "That's a good one, but it seems to be what he was waitin' for."

"Goin' to stop, are you?" says I. "Thank you," says he, "I will stay a little while if you don't mind," and he proceeds to shut off the gasolene and climb out. The dog follows him.

"Givin' some one the slip?" says I. "Oh, no," says he, "I'm not. I'm just in a race, that's all."

"I-ee-s," says I. "Had a start, didn't you?" "A little," says he.

With that he sits down on the steps, snuggles the terrier up alongside of him and begins to look me and the place over careful, without sayin' any more. Course, that ain't the way boys usually act, but I guess he was nervous, and this one didn't seem at all shy. As near as I could guess he was thinkin' hard, so I let him take his time. I figures out from his looks and his shovin' in the bushes that he had come from some of them big country places near by, and that when he gets ready he'll let out what he's after. Sure enough, pretty soon he opens up.

"Wouldn't you like to buy the machine, sir?" says he.

"Selling out, are you?" says I. "Well, what's your askin' price for a rig of that kind?"

He sizes me up for a minute and then sends out a feeler. "Would five dollars be too much?"

"No," says I. "I shouldn't call that a squeeze, providin' you threw in the dog."

He looks real worried then, and hugs the terrier up closer than ever. "I couldn't sell Togo," says he. "You wouldn't want him, too, would you?"

"When I sees that it wouldn't take much more to get them big blue eyes of his to leakin' I puts him easy on the dog question. I says, 'You're your idea of sellin' the bubble?'"

"Why," says he, "I won't need any longer. I'm going to be a motorman on a trolley car."

"That's a real swell job," says I. "But how will the folks at home take it?" "The folks at home?" says he, lookin' me straight in the eye. "Why, there aren't any. I haven't any home, you know."

Honest, the way he passed out that whopper was worth watchin'. It was done as cool and scientific as a real estate man takin' out there wasn't a mosquito in the whole county.

"Then you're just travelin' around loose, eh?" says I. "Where'd you strike from today?" "Chicago," says he. "That's quite a day's run. You must have left before breakfast."

"I had breakfast early," says he. "Dinner in Buffalo," says I. "I didn't stop for dinner," says he. "In that case—what's the name?" says I.

"Never had so much fun out of a car ride since," says I. "But I was on the war path then. My outfit was a blank cartridge pistol, a scalpin' knife hooked from the kitchen and a couple of nickel libbies that told all about injun killin'. Don't lay out to slaughter any redskins, do you?"

He looks kind of weary, and shakes his head.

"Well, runnin' a trolley car has its good points, I s'pose," says I. "But I wouldn't tackle it for a year or so if I was you. You'd better give me your phone number and I'll ring up the folks, so they won't be worryin' about you."

But say, this Gerald boy, alias Mr. Smith, don't fall for any smooth talk like that. He just sets his jaw hard and remarks, quiet like, "I guess I'd better be going."

"Where to?" says I. "New Haven ought to be a good place to sell the machine," says he. "I can get a job there, too."

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runs the bubble around into the stable and I tucks him and Togo away together in the spare box.

"Who's the little lad?" says Dennis to me.

"For one thing," says I, "he's an honorary member of the Ananias club. If I can dig up any more information between now and mornin', Dennis, I'll let you know."

First I calls up two or three village police stations along the line, but they hadn't had word of any stray kid.

"That's funny," thinks I. "If he'd lived down in Hester street there'd be four thousand cops huntin' him up by this time."

But it wasn't my cue to do the frettin', so I lets things rest as they are, only takin' a look at the kid before I turns in, to see that he was safe. And say, that one look gets me all broke up, for when I tiptoes in with the candle I finds that pink and white face of his all streaked up with cryin', and one arm around Togo, like he thought that terrier was all the friend he had left.

Geel! but that makes me feel mean! Why, if I'd known he was goin' to blubber himself to sleep that way I'd hung around and cheered him up. He'd been so brash about this runaway business, though, that I never suspected he'd go to pieces the minute he was left alone. And they look different when they're cryin', don't they? I guess I must have put in the next two hours wonderin' how it was that a nice, bright youngster like that should come to quit home. If he'd come from some tenement house, where it was a case of pop bein' on the island and maw rushin' the can and usin' the poker on him, you wouldn't think anything of it. But here he has his bubble and his high top shoes and things like that, and yet he does the skip. Well, there wasn't any answer.

Not hearin' him stirrin' when I gets up in the mornin' I makes up my mind to let him snooze as long as he likes.

So I has breakfast and goes out front with the mornin' papers. It got to be after 9 o'clock and I was just thinkin' of goin' up to see how he was gettin' on when I sees a big green toun' car come dashin' down into the park and turn into my front drive. There was a crowd in it, but before I can get up out flips a stunnin' lookin' bunch of dry goods, all veils and silk dust coats, and wants to know if I'm Shorty McCabey, which I says I was.

"Then you have my boy here, have you?" she shoots out. And say, by the suspicious way she looks at me you'd thought I'd been breakin' into some nursery. I'll admit she was a beaut, and but cut out the hold-up business and the graft conversation. Now, again, what's the name?"

"Maybe if I knew who you was, 'am,' says I, 'we'd get along faster.'"

"That don't soothe her a bit. She gives me one glare, and then whirls around and shouts at a couple of tough lookin' bruisers that was in the car.

"Quick!" she sings out. "Watch the rear and side doors. I'm sure he's here."

And the mugs pile out and proceed to plant themselves around the house. "Sa-a-a-y," says I, "this begins to look excitin'. Is it a raid or what? Who are the husky boys?"

"Those men are in my employ," says she.

"Private sleuts?" says I. "They are," says she, "and if you'll give up the boy without any trouble I will pay just what you want. You're gettin' to hide him. I'm going to have him, anyway."

"Well, well!" says I. And say, maybe you can guess by that time I was feelin' like it was a warm day. If I'd had on a celluloid collar I'd blown up. Inside of ten seconds I've shucked my coat and am mixin' it with the plug that's guardin' the side door. The doin's was short

and sweet. He's no sooner slumped down to feel what's happened to his jaw than No. 2 comes up. He acts like he was ambitious to do damage, but the third punch leaves him on the grass. Then I takes each of 'em by the ear, leads 'em out to the road and gives 'em a little leather farewell to help 'em get under way.

"Sorry to muss your hired help, ma'am," says I, comin' back to the front stoop, "but this is one place in the country where private detectives ain't wanted. And another thing, let's not have any more talk about me bein' paid. If there's anyone here belongin' to you, you can have him and welcome, but cut out the hold-up business and the graft conversation. Now, again, what's the name?"

"That's the size of it," says I. Oh, the boss, and she's one of the kind that knows when she's up against it, too. "I am Mrs. Rutgers Greene," she says.

"Oh, yes," says I. "From down on the point?"

"Mr. Greene lives at Orienta Point, I believe," says she.

Now that was plain enough, wasn't it? You wouldn't think I'd need postin' on what they was sayin' at the clubs after that. But these high life break aways are so common you can't keep track of all of 'em, and she sprung it off hand that I didn't more'n half tumble to what she meant.

"I suppose I may have Gerald now?" she goes on.

"Sure," says I. "I'll bring him down." And as I skips up the stairs I sings out. "Hey, Mr. Smith! Your maw's come for you!"

There was nothin' doin', though. I knocks on the door and calls again. Next I goes in. And say, it wasn't until I'd pawed over all the clothes and looked under the bed and into the closet that I could believe it. He must have got up at daylight, slipped down the back way in his stockin' feet and

skipped. The note on the wash stand clinches it. It was wrote kind of wobbly and the spellin' was some streaked, but there wa'n't any mistakin' what he meant. He was sorry he had to tell so many whoppers, but he wa'n't ever goin' home any more, and he was moppin' for my tip about the freight car. Maybe my jaw didn't drop.

"Thick head!" says I, catchin' sight of myself in the bureau glass. "You would get humorous." "When I goes back down stairs I finds Mrs. Greene pacin' the porch. "Well?" says I.

"I throws up my hands. "Skipped," says I.

"Do you mean to say he has gone?" she snaps.

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"Thick head!" says I, catchin' sight of myself in the bureau glass. "You would get humorous." "When I goes back down stairs I finds Mrs. Greene pacin' the porch. "Well?" says I.

"Now," says I, "seem' as this is a family affair, I beg pardon," puts in Greene, "but you hardly understand the situation. Mrs. Greene need not be consulted at all."

"I've as much right to Gerald as you have," says she, her eyes snappin' like a trolley wheel on a wet night.

"We will allow the courts to decide that point," says he, real frosty.

"I don't want to butt in on any tender little domestic scene," says I, "but I was you two I'd find the kid first. He's been gone since daylight."

"Gone!" says Greene. "Where?" "There's no tellin' that," says I. "All I know is that when he left here he was headed for the railroad track, meanin' to jump a freight train and—"

"The railroad?" squeals Mrs. Greene. "Oh, he'll be killed! Oh, Gerald! Gerald!"

Greene don't say a word, but he turns the color of a slice of Swiss cheese.

"Oh, what can we do?" says the lady, wringin' her hands.

"Any of them detectives of yours know the kid by sight?" says I.

"They didn't. Neither did Greene's bunch. They was born fresh topped."

"Well," says I, "I'll own up that part of this is up to me, and I won't feel right until I've made a try to find him. I'm goin' to start now and I don't know how long I'll be gone. From what I've seen I can guess that this cottage will be a little small for you two, but if you're anxious to hear the first returns I'll advise you to stay right here. So long!"

And with that I grabs my hat and makes a dash out the back way, leavin' 'em standin' there back to back. I never tracked a runaway kid along a railroad and I hadn't makes for the yard master and finds the freight I was lookin' for was just about due.

"Expectin' a consignment?" says he. "Yes," says I. "I'm a committee of one to receive a stray kid named Gerald."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" says he. "We get 'em most every week. I'll see that you have a pass to overhaul the empties."

After I'd peeked into about a dozen box cars and dug up nothin' more encouraging than a couple of boozy boes, I begun to think my calculations was all wrong. I was just slidin' under the door shut when I notices a bundle of somethin' over in the far corner. I had half a mind not to climb in, for it didn't look like anything alive, but I takes a chance at it for luck, and the first thing I hears is a growl. The next minute I has Togo by the collar and the kid up on my arm. It was Gerald, all right, though he was that dirty and rumpled I hardly knew him.

He just groans and grabs hold of me like he was afraid I was goin' to get away. Why, the poor little cuss was so beat out and scared he couldn't get a word from him for half an hour. But after awhile I coaxed him to sit up on a stool and have a bite to eat, and when I've washed off some of the grime and pulled out a few splinters from his hands we gets a train back. First off I thought I'd phone Mr. and Mrs. Greene, but then I changes my mind. "Maybe I'll do 'em good to wait," thinks I.

We was half way back when Gerald looks up and says, "You won't take me home, will you?"

"What's the matter with home, kid?" says I.

"Well," says he, and I could see by the struggle he was havin' with his upper lip that he was comin' out hard. "Mother says father isn't a nice man and father says I musn't believe what she says and all, and—and I don't think like either of them well enough to be their little boy any more. I don't like being stolen so often, either."

"Stolen?" says I. "You see, when I'm with father, mother is always sendin' men to grab me and take me off where she is. Then father sends men to get me back, and—and I don't believe I've got any real home any more. That's why I ran away. Wouldn't you?"

"Kid," says I. "I ain't got a word to say."

He was too tired and down in the mouth to do much conversin', either. All he wants to do is curl up with his head against my shoulder and go to sleep. After he wakes up from his nap he feels better, and when he finds we're goin' back to my place he gets quite chipper. All the way walkin' up from the station I tries to think of how it would be best to break the news to him about the grand household scrap that was due to be pulled off the minute we shows up. I couldn't do it, though, until we'd got clear to the house.

"Now, youngster," says I, "there's a little surprise on tap for you here, I guess. You walk up soft and peek through the door."

For a minute I thought maybe they'd cleared out, he was so still about it, so I steps up to rub my eye. And there Mr. and Mrs. Rutgers Greene, sittin' on the sofa about as close as they could get, her weepin' damp streaks down his shirt front and him pattin' her back hair gentle and low.

"Turn off the sprayer!" says I. "Here's the kid!"

Well, we was all mixed up for the next few minutes. They hugs Gerald both to once, and then they hugs each other, and if I hadn't ducked just as I did I ain't sure what would have happened to me. When I comes back half an hour later all I needs is one glance to see that a lot of private sleuts and court lawyers is out of a job.

"Shorty," says Greene, jivin' me the hearty grin, "I don't know how I'm ever goin' to—"

"Ah, lose it!" says I. "It was just by a fluke I got on the job anyway. That's a great kid of yours, eh?"

Did I say anything about Primrose Park bein' a place where nothin' ever happened? Well, you can scratch that.

An Error in Estimates

BY JEANNETTE COOPER.



"I can do the English fine," she said."

Patrice was the only arrival by the late train, and the drawing room and the office gave her some attention as she mounted the stairway, preceded by Kate with her handbag and followed by the porter with her trunk. It was a very much beleveled trunk, and the drawing room and the office transferred the weary attention to that as Patrice passed out of sight. Then they severally wondered whether she also was from the west and whether she was as reserved as her friend, Miss Lawrence.

Meanwhile Patrice sat happily in the rocking chair with the broken leg and asked Kate a hundred questions.

"Yes," said Kate, "the place is lovely. It is more than that, it is a New England with pine woods and high green hills and rocks and brooks and bird calls in the rhythm of it."

"That's pretty," said Patrice, "but in your voice there is a reservation. Kate dropped her voice. Also she dropped herself upon the floor beside the trunk and began to unlock it.

"It is the people," she said. "They are the embroiling kind. All day long they sit upon the porch and embroider. Occasionally they pause to select a new green thread and ask if you have noticed the mountains. You got some more clothes in New York, Patrice?"

"Only that blouse and a hat," said Patrice, guiltily.

Kate shook her head and proceeded to look for the hat. "I ought not to look for it," she said. "You ought not to look for it, even for a week," she murmured.

"What else do the people do?" inquired Patrice.

"Embroider," said Kate. "The men don't embroider, do they?" "The men?" Kate had found the hat and was trying it on; she spoke absently. "There aren't any men."

"There must be one or two; there always are."

"Well, there is the husband of the Battenburg centerpiece," said Kate, proceeding with her investigations.

"Any one who isn't a husband?" "Mr. French. He smiles. Do you like a pleasant man?"

"Certainly not. I prefer them when they bite. Who else?" "You forgot his last name. He suppresses his voice when he speaks to you, and he glides."

"Is that all?" "The two southern girls are expecting a cousin. They are thin and dark—the two southern girls—are and are always leaning against each other. They are doing marquette wreaths on blue denim pillow covers—very sweet! I don't remember this lace sunshade."

"They were having a sale of them. It seemed improprietous not to get one. Who is the man that met me at the station?"

"Mr. Robert Adamson. He has been taking graduate work at Harvard and now drives the Holmers' horses. Miss Enderleigh is authority for the fact that his family is undesirable. Therefore the ladies would be willing to overlook his moral position, but he seems not to see their advances."

"He wasn't really responsive when I spoke to him," acknowledged Patrice. "Kate laughed. "What did you do?" she said.

"Kept still, of course, and when he asked if that was all my luggage, replied with a haughty nod. We rode from the station in entire silence side by side."